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## **The Role of Theory and Policy in the Educational Treatment of Language Minority Students: Competitive Structures in California**

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### **Abstract**

For teachers, theories play a central role in guiding the intellectual work that they have chosen to perform. Teachers are guided by both theories which they use to interpret, analyze and take action in their professional worlds. At any given time, teachers may be faced with multiple and competing theoretical perspectives which attempt to influence their classroom practice. In this article, we examine the theoretical and policy-based positions currently competing to shape the nature of educational practice for language minority students. We highlight the salient theoretical differences between *additive* and *subtractive conceptions* for the education of language minority students and their policy- and practice-based implications. Then, we examine select findings from one district's implementation of

Proposition 227, and consider how teachers react when competing theories attempt to shape their classroom practice. Specifically, we consider: How might teachers' theories be complemented or contrasted by the underlying theoretical position of Proposition 227? How do teachers' theories about their students mediate the manner in which they react and respond to the policy shift away from native language instruction? We conclude by considering what implications *additive* and *subtractive* competitive structures have for the future of policy and practice for language minority students in the United States.

In their practice, teachers are like other learners in the sense that they interpret new ideas and attempts to change their practice based on their existing understandings. The manner in which teachers modify new ideas is based upon their guiding extant theories about their profession and their students (Cohen & Barnes, 1993; Kennedy, 1991; Woods, 1994).

The importance of teachers' theories and world views has been highlighted by empirical research. In a recent study of effective teachers for language minority students, teachers reported that they have very well articulated theories of how children develop and learn and the role education plays in such processes (Garcia, 1999). In short, whether we articulate them or not, we all have theories that guide us in making meaning of the world we live in.

Consequently, it is important to look more explicitly at conceptual frameworks—theories—which might help us understand the educational circumstances of language minority students and their teachers. This is particularly the case when a host of competing theories attempt to drive policy and practice for language minority students. Such is the case with California's Proposition 227 and its attempt to end bilingual education in that state. Specifically, we consider the following two questions: First, how might teachers' theories be complemented or contrasted by the underlying theoretical position of Proposition 227? Second, how do teachers' theories about their students mediate the manner in which they react and respond to policy shift away from native language instruction? To consider these questions, we examine the theoretical and policy-based positions currently competing to shape the nature of educational practice for language minority students. Then, to consider the empirical implications of these questions, we examine select findings from Walton Unified School District's implementation of Proposition 227. We use the experiences of the three teachers' from the small rural district to illustrate how teachers' theories regarding the needs of their students, bilingual education, and language maintenance influenced their reaction to Proposition 227. (For a full discussion of Proposition 227 implementation in Walton Unified see Stritikus (2002).) We conclude by considering what implications competitive structures have for the future of policy and practice for language minority students in the United States.

## **Competing Theories for the Education Language Minority Students**

Proposition 227, known by its proponents as the "English for the Children Initiative," passed with a 61% majority of California voters on June 2, 1998. The initiative was

an example of “people making law,” written in response to apparent widespread discontent with the state’s theories/policies regarding the education of non-English speaking children in public schools. Its intent was to inject more English instruction for these students in California’s public schools. Some 25% of California’s students currently fall into this student category and are referred to as Limited English Proficient (LEP), English Language Learners (ELL), and/or as language minority students. The assumption which lay under the initiative was that teaching children in their native language served only to hold them back in their acquisition of English and therefore in their future educational success.

Immediately upon its passage, Proposition 227 became a part of the California Education Code (#300-340). As it required within its text, districts throughout the state were given only 60 days to implement it. Under this new education code, children entering California Public Schools with very little English must be “observed” for a period of 30 calendar days. After 30 days, school personnel must decide if children have enough fluency in English to manage in a mainstream English classroom. If not, they are eligible to receive one year of “Sheltered English Immersion,” also referred to as “Structured English Immersion,” a program of English language instruction not described in detail in the law except to require that instruction be “nearly all” in English (with a definition for the term “nearly all” left up to the district’s discretion). After one year, children are normally expected to integrate into mainstream English classrooms, where instruction is required to be “overwhelmingly” in English (again, with a definition for the term “overwhelmingly” left up to the district’s discretion). If parents or legal guardians find that district or school personnel, including classroom teachers, “willfully and repeatedly refuse” to provide the English instruction as required, they have the right to sue for damages. This aspect of the law has not yet been fully tested in the courts.

The only legal alternative to placing an ELL student in a Sheltered English Immersion and/or mainstream English classrooms is the utilization of the parental waiver process. According to the new law, children who have special language needs, or whose parents specifically request it, can be placed in “Alternative Programs,” most likely some form of bilingual program which includes instruction in the child’s primary language. In order for a child to be enrolled in such a program, the parent or guardian must visit the school annually and sign a waiver requesting the placement. However, the first year a child enters California schools s/he must go through 30 days of “observation,” generally conducted in English language classrooms, even if s/he has a signed waiver. Once the 30 days is completed, the child can enroll in an alternative program.

Along with the changes outlined above, the law allocates \$50,000,000 per year to train adult English learners, parents or members of the community, to serve as tutors for children learning English. Finally, the new law is careful to state that if any conflicts are uncovered between its requirements and federal, state or constitutional law, those conflicts are resolved by following the “higher authority” of that previous law.

There are some areas of the California State Board of Education’s policy regarding the instruction of Language Minority children that were not at all affected by the passage of Proposition 227. Teacher credentialing has remained the same, as have the requirements regarding the assessment of LEP children in English and in their

native language. It is still required by law that schools and districts communicate with language minority families in their primary language whenever necessary. Children who are identified as in need of Special Education and operate under an Individual Education Plan are not touched by the changes.

## **Proposition 227 and the Move to Toward Subtractive Schooling**

Proposition 227 certainly altered basic elements of policy toward language minority children in California's public schools. There had been a twenty-year tradition, thorough legislative and executive actions, encouraging, even mandating bilingual education programs in California. In 1987, these laws officially sunset, leaving districts less clear on the mandate from the state. Nonetheless, even since 1987, there had been a climate of increasing openness toward bilingual programs and other special services for language minority students among California school districts. Although state level support of bilingual education existed, multiple districts and schools across the state had taken steps to limit or weaken bilingual education programs (Wong Fillmore, 1992).

Bilingual education is not, and never has been, a neutral process. The education of linguistically diverse students is situated in larger issues about immigration, distribution of wealth and power, and the empowerment of students (Cummins, 2000; Heller, 1994). Policy and practice questions are situated in debates surrounding the legitimacy of the language and culture of diverse groups (Olsen, 1997). The subtractive and additive frameworks advanced in this literature review offer a way to situate the nature of teacher theories, educational practice, and educational policy in these broader debates surrounding the place of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the United States. A debate intensified by the changes in the California Education Code brought about by the voter initiative Proposition 227 and its reversal of the state's official support of primary language instruction.

Garcia (1995) and Garcia and Gonzalez (1995) serve as exemplars of the theoretical/policy/practice position that was overturned by Proposition 227. Imbedded in this additive perspective for language minority students is the understanding that language, culture, and their accompanying values, are constructed in the home and community environments, that children come to school with some constructed knowledge about many things, and that children's development and learning is best understood as the interaction of previous and present linguistic, socio-cultural, and cognitive constructions. An appropriate perspective of teaching language minority students is one that recognizes that learning becomes enhanced when it occurs in contexts that are socio-culturally, linguistically and cognitively meaningful for the learner (Garcia, 1995; Moll, 1994). Moreover, policies should reflect these conceptual underpinnings. It was the case that re-authorization of federal policy did exactly that, recognizing the importance of native language instruction and supporting those programs that were additive in nature (Garcia and Gonzalez, 1995; Wiese and Garcia, 1998). Table 1 exemplifies the attributes of school-wide and teacher practices associated with this conceptual framework. This is clearly contrasted with the conceptual framework that is at the foundation of Proposition 227: a disregard for non-English skills and circumstances outside of school and a focus on the instruction of English in English. Table 2 articulates the school-wide practices and teacher practices following from this

conceptual framework. The distinction between additive and subtractive conceptions of cultural and linguistic diversity is not meant to be a strict dichotomy of policies and practices, but rather a framework for understanding the range of possible educational alternatives which exist for cultural and linguistically diverse students.

**Table 1. Additive Conceptual Dimensions of Addressing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

**School-wide Practices**

- A vision defined by the acceptance and valuing of diversity--Americanization is NOT the goal
- Professional development characterized by collaboration, flexibility and continuity with a focus on teaching, learning and student achievement
- Elimination (gradual or immediate) of policies that seek to categorize diverse students thereby rendering their educational experiences as inferior or limiting for further academic learning
- Reflection of and connection to surrounding community--particularly with the families of the students attending the school

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**Teacher Practices**

- Bilingual/bicultural skills and awareness
- High expectations of diverse students
- Treatment of diversity as an asset to the classroom
- Ongoing professional development on issues of cultural and linguistic diversity and practices that are most effective
- Basis of curriculum development to address cultural and linguistic diversity
- Attention to and integration of home culture/practices
- Focus on maximizing student interactions across categories of Spanish and English proficiency and academic performance
- Focus on language development through meaningful interactions and communications

**Table 2. Subtractive Conceptual Dimensions of Addressing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

**School-wide Practices**

- A vision defined by the learning of English--Americanization/assimilation is the goal
- Professional development characterized a focus on direct teaching, emphasizing instruction of

- phonology, grammar and phonics in reading
  - Elimination (gradual or immediate) of policies that seek to provide special instruction to a category of students marked by their non-English proficiency
  - Connection to surrounding community--particularly with the families of the students attending the school emphasizing the development and use of English
- 

### **Teacher Practices**

- English development skills and awareness
- Expectations that English proficiency by students will enhance academic achievement
- Treatment of linguistic diversity as a characteristic that must be minimized
- Ongoing professional development and direct enforcement of direct teaching practices
- Basis of curriculum development to address cultural and linguistic assimilation
- Attention to and integration of diverse cultures into the "norm"
- Focus on maximizing student academic English development as assessed by English language development and academic testing--in many cases, "high stakes" testing
- Focus on English language, reading and literacy development through methods of direct instructions of skills

The subtractive position advanced by Proposition 227—as summarized by the practices embodied in Table 2—is contrasted by multiculturalist and multilingualist notions that English-only instruction is deeply problematic. Rather than view the home language and culture through a lens of deficit, multiculturalist and additive perspectives urge schools to see these as valuable educational resources. (Banks, 1995; Garcia, 1999; Gutiérrez, et al., 2000; Olneck, 1995). Proposition 227 presents a direct challenge to the notion that languages other than English have a legitimate and valuable place in the education of diverse students. Hence, the normative assumptions underlying Proposition 227 position the language and culture of diverse students in a subordinate and inferior role to English (Auerbach, 1995; Cummins, 2000; Kerper-Mora, 2000).

These normative assumptions have important consequences that extend beyond the classroom. The nature of the law works to position certain groups in a peripheral role in American society. Sekhon (1999), in an article assessing the legal and political implications of the proposition, argues that Proposition 227 positions immigrants on the outside of mainstream America:

Proposition 227 positions English as “our” language by constructing it as

our unlearned capacity: It is our birthright. The proposition differentiates “us” from “them” by denominating them in terms of an essential inability to call English their own. They must learn it. Proposition 227 not only demands that they learn our language, it demands that they forget their own. In so demanding, the proposition not only unleashes a salvo in the bilingual education debate, but is a crucial moment in the broader debate over assimilation and acculturation. (p. 1445)

Thus, in its scope, focus, and ideological implications, Proposition 227 differs markedly from past educational reforms. Teachers were not only told to shift educational practice, but forced to participate in an evolving debate about which theory would hold prominence in the education of language minority students. The distinction between additive and subtractive conceptions becomes a useful device for probing teachers’ existing theories regarding their students, and how those theories interacted with district and school decisions regarding Proposition 227 to establish a context for classroom practice.

## **Competing Theories in Action: A District’s Responses to 227**

To understand how competing theories regarding the education of language minority students materialize into action, we examine select findings from one district’s implementation of Proposition 227. Focusing on the responses of three teachers in the district, we examine how additive and subtractive theories influenced and shaped the nature of Proposition 227 implementation.

### **Walton Unified School District**

Despite its attempt to prescribe a very uniform solution for the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students across the state of California, the law’s impact on education of ELL students has varied widely from district to district, school to school, and in some cases classroom to classroom. Garcia & Curry-Rodriguez (2000) and Gandara et al. (2000) report that certain districts across the state have used the waiver clause of the law to pursue district wide waivers, others have implemented the English Only provisions of the law, and a third group has left the primary decisions up to individual schools. The implementation decisions made by “Westway” and “Open Valley,” the two elementary schools which are the focus of this research, represent a microcosm of what occurred across the state. Each school took actions based upon “competing ideologies” about how schools should respond to the challenge of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Walton Unified School District devised a plan that maximized flexibility for Westway and Open Valley. Under the plan, the schools could choose between maintaining their bilingual programs through the parental waiver process, or developing a program for ELL students called “English Language Development” (ELD).

At Westway Elementary, all students who had been in bilingual programs were placed in self-contained ELD classes. The context for Proposition 227 implementation at Westway Elementary was shaped by the school’s positive orientation towards English-only instruction and curricular control arrangements. The decision to shift to English-only was made by the school’s veteran principal, ‘Beverly Elmherst,’ who in the past had tended away from hiring certified bilingual teachers.



Consequently, the school had only three teachers who held the Bilingual Crosscultural Language and Academic Development (BLCAD) certificate. This hiring pattern meant there were very few strong advocates for maintaining the school's program.

The school's movement away from primary language use coincided with the state-wide decade-long movement toward phonics-based reading instruction and away from meaning-based or whole language instruction. A series of laws passed throughout the 1990s culminated in the California Reading Initiative (CRI), a collaborative effort between the state legislature, the Governor, and the California Department of Education. The new policy advocates a *balanced* approach to literacy instruction. It defines balanced literacy instruction with a definitive nod toward decoding and direct phonics instruction:

A balanced approach involves considerable time and effort dedicated to basic decoding while attention is given to important meaning-based aspects of reading. For most students, however, intensive direct teaching of phonemic awareness, sound-symbol relationships, blending skills, and reading fluency is of primary importance. (CRI, p. 4)

The changes in literacy policy have positioned phonics and phonemic awareness as the primary concerns for early literacy instruction.

Consistent with the move on the state the level toward phonics-based instruction, in February of 1998, the school adopted Open Court Collections for Young Scholars (hereafter, Open Court) as the school wide language arts series. Open Court uses explicit teacher-directed instruction to teach phonemic awareness, phonics, and reading comprehension. During the instructional components of the program, which include teacher-directed writing and reading exercises, and skills practice drills, teachers use scripts for all teacher questions, prompts, and responses. During blending, a center piece of the program, teachers read all sounds of a word and have students repeat them. Reading and writing activities are tightly controlled by the teacher.

While the school-wide context at Westway was characterized by a lack of curricular freedom and a climate favorable to English-only, the local school context at Open Valley was quite different. First, the overall climate of the school showed an overwhelming commitment to the goals of bilingual and multicultural education. Second, teachers at Open Valley experienced a great deal of curricular freedom. In the fall of 1999, the teachers at the school mobilized to secure parental waivers in order to maintain the school's bilingual program. Nearly every child who was in a bilingual program prior to the proposition was in a bilingual program in the fall of 1999. To avoid a second year of the waiver process in the spring of 1999, the teachers and administration of Open Valley applied for and received Charter status. Under California law, Charter status gave the school curricular flexibility and freedom from the direct mandates of Proposition 227.

## **Teachers**

The research on the implementation of Proposition 227 focused on four teachers—two at both Open Valley and Westway. At Open Valley, the research

focused on two teachers, “Elisa” and “Angelica”.

Angelica, a fifth year teacher, came to teaching through her involvement in a migrant education program as an undergraduate. Although she was only in her late-20s, she had taught Sunday School for 12 years. She credited her experience with the migrant education program and her work in Sunday School as having a large influence on her teaching. She was born in Mexico, but attended school in California when her parents immigrated. During the year of the study, Angelica taught a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade bilingual class of approximately 18 students. The second grade students in her class received language arts and math instruction in Spanish. Instruction in the afternoon, which included art, ESL, and social studies, occurred in English.

Born in Mexico, Elisa was educated in California and grew up in the Central Valley. She had been a teacher for four years—all of them at Open Valley and each in a different grade. During the 1999-2000 academic year, Elisa taught a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade bilingual classroom of approximately 14-20 students. Elisa’s decision to enter teaching was closely related to her experiences as a child. Elisa had worked in the fields of the Central Valley, and felt that experience helped her to identify with the instructional and social needs of her immigrant students.

Two teachers, “Celia” and “Connie”, were the focus of the research at Westway, but in this paper we present findings only related to Connie. We have chosen to focus on Connie to examine the manner in which existing deficit orientations in teachers interact with a subtractive policy context. Additionally, Celia’s rather complex and multifaceted reaction to Proposition 227 implementation has been examined in another article (Stritikus, in press).

Connie, a Portuguese-American with 11 years of teaching experience, had always been assigned a bilingual classroom but never remembers requesting to be a bilingual teacher. Because the structure of the bilingual program prior to Proposition 227 placed native language instructional responsibility in the hands of teaching aides, Connie never worked directly with her immigrant students in the area of primary language instruction. During the study, Connie taught a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, self-contained *English Language Development* class of 20 students.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

The research began in the spring of 1998-1999 and continued the research through the end of the 1999-2000 academic year. The research took place at Westway Elementary and Open Valley Elementary, the two largest schools in the small rural district of Walton Unified.

Stritikus used multiple sources of data to build a picture of the implementation of Proposition 227, and observed the teachers in a host of different situations including classroom literacy instruction, grade-level meetings, all-school meetings, and district-level meetings concerning ELL issues. In addition, each teacher and other key participants in the district were interviewed.

Stritikus observed each of the teachers’ classrooms a minimum of 21 times. During classroom observations, Stritikus focused on the nature of literacy instruction.

Scratch-notes (Emerson, et al., 1995) and audio recordings from observations were used to create detailed fieldnotes. After Stritikus left the research site in May 2000, he completed a close reading of the entire set of fieldnotes looking for “certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects’ ways of thinking, and events that stand out” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992: 166). During these initial read-throughs, he asked questions of the data which centered on building an understanding of how teachers’ beliefs and theories influenced literacy instruction in their post-Proposition 227 classrooms (Emerson, et al., 1995; Glasser & Strauss, 1967). To address each question, analytic commentaries grounded in the data were written. The analytic commentaries served as the basis of the themes generated from the data and were central in the development of codes and data analysis.

## **Findings**

The manner in which the three teachers responded and reacted to Proposition 227 is illustrative of the way that subtractive and additive theories compete to shape the nature of the policy to practice connection. In large part, teachers guiding theories about their students influenced the way they mediated and negotiated the policy shifts brought about by changes in bilingual education policy. In the following sections, we explicate the connection between classroom practice and policy shifts by examining the role that teachers’ theories played in the process. We highlight how aspects of a subtractive policy context brought certain aspects of teachers’ additive or subtractive theories to the surface in their decision making process.

### **Teachers’ Theories in Programs that Retained Bilingual Education**

For Angelica and Elisa remarkably similar guiding theories drove their intellectual work at the school. Each teacher believed that native language instruction provided significant academic, cognitive, social, and cultural benefits for their students. For both teachers, the academic and cultural benefits of bilingualism were inextricably linked and strengthened their resolve and commitment to bilingual education. Angelica described her theory on the manner in which language minority students could most attain academic success:

Yes, it is hard to remain a bilingual. But, if you don’t give students a base—the foundation that the child needs to use against the second language—success in the second language is not going to happen. Basically, we are all here in this America. And, we do all need to speak the language of this country, but that doesn’t mean that we have to let go of our language. (Angelica, Interview, May, 2000)

For Angelica, academic success and participation in American society did not mean that students had to sacrifice elements of their social and cultural identities. For her, these identities served as the basis for student success. Angelica believed that Proposition 227, and its supporters, were asking Latino students to leave crucial elements of their culture and language behind. She saw her role as a teacher to ensure that this didn’t happen at Open Valley.

Elisa echoed many of Angelica’s theories about the benefits of bilingualism and native language instruction. In addition, she saw the use of native language

instruction as direct part of a strategy of the advancement of Latino students. The genesis of this theory was related to her own experiences as a migrant farm worker:

The sun was coming out at five o'clock in the morning. I was there alone. There was nobody in the field. I was just left there and I was waiting for the people to get there. I was maybe fourteen or fifteen. I kept thinking: What I am going to do? I didn't want to work in the fields for the rest of my life. That's actually what brought me up wanting to teach. It's like: I want to do something productive for my people—for the kids and parents who work in the fields because I saw how hard they work and they really didn't make any money. So, I wanted to make a difference. That's why I became a bilingual teacher. (Elisa, Interview, April, 2000)

Both teachers' guiding theories saw bilingualism as a social and academic resource and viewed tapping into students' existing linguistic capacity as the best way to ensure their academic success. The teachers possessed theories which allowed for student to be multilingual and still play valuable and meaningful roles in U.S. society. For both teachers, these theories had their roots in their personal experiences and the benefits of bilingualism they had gained as well as hardship they experienced in schools which did not value their linguistic diversity.

### **From Theory to Action: Teaching in a Bilingual School**

For Angelica and Elisa, theories about language minority students lead to particular types of responses to policy shifts. Angelica, for example, became a very vocal proponent for bilingual education after the passage of Proposition 227. She used her standing in the school to rally support for the school's bilingual program and helped secure the parental waivers necessary to continue bilingual education at the school. Each teacher used native language instruction in real and substantial ways in their classroom, which included assessments done in English and Spanish. Both teachers commented that Proposition 227 had renewed their commitments to bilingual education. Angelica continually looked for opportunities to defend the school's program and petitioned the district for resources related to bilingual education.

For Elisa, her renewed commitment was directly related to the manner in which she saw language use in her classroom:

Creo que me hizo un poco mas rebelde [I think it has made me bit more rebellious] about using Spanish. Before I was like I shouldn't speak in Spanish, because we are being asked to move away from bilingual education. But, now, I don't feel that way. (Elisa, Interview, April, 2000)

Her commentary illustrates the manner in which the subtractive policy context brought certain elements of teachers' theories to the surface as they negotiated aspects of Proposition 227.

To understand the manner in which teachers' theories serve to mediate their responses to policy shifts, we present the following data excerpt from the first day of English-guiding reading groups in Elisa's third grade classroom. The event illustrates her attempt to create an additive context for learning in her classroom.

Elisa commented that the debate over Proposition 227 had made her more committed to making sure that her the students saw their home language as a resource. On the first day of English guided reading, Elisa lead each of the groups that she worked with through a series of activities in Spanish. Each of the five groups she worked with examined a picture of animal. Elisa solicited comments from the students about the animal. After having a conversation about the picture, Elisa gave the students five minutes to write a few sentences about the picture. The following conversation occurred between Elisa and Ernesto, Rosa, Cristóbal, Betty, and Daniel after they had concluded the activity.

Elisa	Students	Action
Ok, ayúdame. Qué es lo que estamos haciendo? (2) Por qué estamos haciendo esto?	Ernesto: (dutifully) Aprender. Rosa: Para aprender los dibujos. Cristóbal: Para aprender más palabras.	All the students have raised their hands and she is calling on them by touching her hand in front of the students.
Para aprender palabras?	Rosa: Para hacer como agarrar palabras de un dibujo.	
[E repeats Rosa's response.] Y para... lo que dijiste ahorita. Si ven como acerlo en español. Y cómo vamos aprender el inglés.	Cristóbal: (take turn with out hand up) Para aprender el inglés.	
Aprendiendo palabras.	Ernesto: Aprendiendo palabras.	
	Elsa: (Hand up--Officially recognized) Tenemos que saber como lo hacemos en español primero y luego es más fácil hacerlo en inglés.	
Si cuando estamos con un dibujo, y	Daniel: Oraciones!	

tenemos palabras, y de las palabras qué hacemos?

De estas oraciones qué podemos hacer?

De un párrafo qué podemos hacer?

Ss: Párrafo.

Ss: Un capítulo  
Un resumen  
Ensayos.

Qué tiene que ver esto con el inglés?

Daniel: Yo voy a saber las palabras que tiene que responder.

Betty: Puedes poner tree en vez de árbol (She is pointing at the white board where Elisa had written some of the sentences students had generated.)

Si saben las palabras en inglés, podemos hacer oraciones en inglés.

Ss: Sí.

Y luego podemos hacer párrafos.

Ss: Sí.

Luego podemos hacer ensayos en inglés.

At this point the pace of the discussion quickens.

After Betty's comments Elisa asks the students using "what can I put in place of.." with each of the Spanish words that they had come up with to describe the picture. The student excitedly call out the English words.

After this exchange, Elisa tells the students that when they are learning a second language their mind will have to work extra hard, and that sometimes they will have to think first in Spanish to get the job done.

#### English Translation

Elisa

Students

Action

Ok, help me out. What are we doing? Why are we doing this?

	Ernesto: (dutifully) To learn.	All the students have raised their hands and she is calling on them by touching her hand in front of the students.
	Rosa: To learn about drawings.	
	Cristóbal: To learn words.	
To learn words?		
	Rosa: To learn how to take words from a picture.	
[E repeats Rosa's response.] Y for... What do you just say? You can see how we do it in Spanish Y how are we going to learn English?	Cristóbal: (take turn w/o hand up) To learn English.	
	Ernesto: Learning words.	
Learning words.		
	Elsa: (Hand up--Officially recognized) We have to know how to do it in Spanish first and then it will be easier to do it in English.	
Yes, and when we are working with a picture, and we have words, for the words what do we make?	Daniel: Sentences	
And from those sentences what can you do?	Ss: Paragraphs.	
From one paragraph what can we do?		At this point the pace of the discussion quickens.
	Ss: A chapter A summary An essay	
What does all this have to do with English?	Daniel: I'll know the words I need to know to answer the questions.	
	Betty: You can put 'tree' [said in English.] in place of arbol. (she is pointing	After Betty's comments Elisa asks the students using "que puedo poner en vez" with each of the Spanish words that they

at the white board where  
Elisa had written some of  
the sentences students  
had generated.)

If you know English,  
can we do sentences in  
English?

Ss: Yes.

student excitedly call out  
the words.

And later can we do  
paragraphs?

Ss: Yes.

And later can we do  
essays?

Ss: Yes.

The nature of teacher and student interaction on the first day of English guided reading was very telling. The message of the exchange was clear: “If you can do it in Spanish, you can do it English.” Students were eager participants in these types of conversations and shared stories about bilingual relatives or about community members who spoke English and Spanish fluently

Elisa’s decision to establish an instructional context in which Spanish was presented to the students as a direct way to make sense of English also had important consequences in terms of the way students approached learning tasks in the guided reading group. During the interaction of this group, the students eagerly explored the new ways they would be able to use English. Her framing of learning English as an activity created a sense of excited energy for the students. This excitement surfaced as the students discussed what they would one day be able to do with English. Daniel proclaims that he “will know the words that he has to know to respond [to questions].” And, Betty unsolicited offers her English knowledge to the group suggesting that Elisa substitute the tree for Spanish word “arbol.” Elisa created an additive context in which she encouraged students to capitalize on their existing linguistic resources during their acquisition of English. The context established by Elisa made it clear to the students that Spanish was viewed as a language learning resource by their teacher. Because the focus of the study was to understand teachers’ conceptions of bilingualism, we can not with certainty claim that this additive conception had a direct impact on students’ conceptions of their own bilingualism. For Elisa, however, her additive conceptions of bilingualism had influenced the manner in which she reacted to the subtractive policy context created by Proposition 227.

### **Angelica: Bring the Fight to Her Classroom**

Angelica’s commitment to bilingual education stemmed from the instances of racism she experienced as a child in American schools. She believed that her language and culture had been “devalued” by her own school experience. The nature of literacy instruction in her classroom seemed to be a direct response to her experience and the subtractive logic behind Proposition 227. Angelica’s saw Proposition 227 as a direct challenge to her ability to provide an additive education for her Latino students:

When Proposition 227 was happening: I saw a lot of Mexicanos on the



news that said: Yeah, we live in this country and we have to speak English. Who are you to speak for somebody else? That's your opinion and maybe you don't want to be bilingual and maybe you fell in love with culture and left your past behind. But, there are many of us who don't want to leave our past behind (Angelica, Interview, May 2000).

Angelica strongly rejected the assimilationist implications of Proposition 227, and saw her classroom as the place to begin to counter the influence of the new law.

In the area of literacy instruction, Angelica believed that reading comprehension would improve if students were able to "see themselves in the story." In her perpetual "fight" for her students, Angelica learned a great deal about the lives of her students. She learned about their families, their siblings, and their home environments. Her knowledge of the students' social worlds was manifested in her interaction with them. Angelica used the knowledge that she had of the students to help them negotiate the stories they read. In helping the students access this knowledge in their negotiations of the written texts, she used a questioning strategy that facilitated student participation (Garcia, 1999; Jimenez & Gersten, 1999). These strategies were evident in the following literacy event as Angelica had a pre-reading discussion with a small reading group.

On the first day of her work with the group, she had given the students extended turns to talk about their experience with pets in their homes and neighborhoods. Over the course of reading the story, Angelica frequently drew upon those discussions in her questions about the story. During this event, Angelica integrated knowledge about her students directly into the instructional discourse.

Six boys are seated at the reading table. The boys are about to read the story "Enrique y Pancho."

Angelica tells the students that they are going to read a story about a narrator who is an only child, and that she wants them to think about what life might be like for an only child.

Angelica	Students	Action
En un a familia pequeña juegas solo, ¿que tienes que hacer en una familia grande? Cesar.	Cesar: Eh, Yo no sé.	As Angelica is asking the question, Cesar has pushed his chair three feet away from the reading table. He is looking around the room with a blank stare.
(Sternly) Piensa. Si en una familia pequeña juegas solo-- que tú nada más fueras el único niño en tu casa-- Tú tienes que jugar con tus juguetes solito,		

¿verdad? (2)

Cesar: (looking up with a sort of “you caught me grin”) ¿ Si alguien estaba?

Y si está Anna (his sister) y todos tus hermanitos, ¿ qué debes hacer con tus juguetes?

Cesar: ¿Eh?

after Angelica's initial questions has a strained look on his face--as if he can't wait to participate. His hand was initially raised, but he lowers it as Angelica talks to Cesar. His eager facial expression never diminishes.

(Continuing off of his last comment) ...Ya no, mi hermano y Anna no pueden jugar juntos, y este

OK, pero Cesar. Si tú juegas solo en tu casa, y como tú tienes una familia grande, qué debes hacer.  
¿Compartir o jugar solo?

Cesar: Compartir con otros. (pauses and smiles) Tengo que compartir mis juguetes.

A: Muy bien, ¿están de acuerdo con Cesar?

Other boys: (With enthusiasm) Sí!

Juan: (speaking out without being formally acknowledge by Angelica) Iba a decir compar compar (Excitedly to the rest of the group). Es lo que iba a decir. Juego con todos.

The other boys at the table nod eagerly at Juan.

In the moments that followed this interaction, the students were told to open their reading books. When they did, they read with the enthusiasm and expression of a stage performance.

English Translation

Angelica

In a small family you play alone, what do you have to do in a big family? Cesar.

(Sternly) Think, if in a small family you play alone—and you are the only kid in your house—You have to play alone, right?

And if Anna is there and all your brother and sisters, what do you have to do with your toys?

What do you have to do with your toys if all your brothers and sisters are in the house?

Who do you play with?

Only with him or with the others?

OK, give me a sentence.

Students

Cesar: Eh, (quickly and chewing his words) I don't know.

Cesar: (looking up with a sort of "you caught me grin") If some one is there?

Cesar: Eh?

Cesar: They play.

Cesar: With my brother.

Cesar: With the others...

(Continuing off of his last comment) ...Now

Action

As Angelica is asking the question, Cesar has pushed his chair three feet away from the reading table. He is looking around the room with a blank stare.

OK, but Cesar. If you play alone in the house, and how you have a large family, what do you have to do? Share or play alone?

Cesar: Share with the others. (pauses and smiles) I have to share my toys.

A: Very good do you agree with Cesar?

Other boys: (With enthusiasm) Yes

A: I am going to write plays with others.

Juan: (speaking out without being formally acknowledge by Angelica) I was going to say sha shar Juan:

(Excitedly to the rest of the group). That is what I was going to so. I play with everyone.

A writes "You play with the others" in the column under "A large family."

This exchange and the questioning strategy used by Angelica demonstrated the place that students' home culture had in shaping the nature of literacy instruction. By capitalizing on her knowledge of Cesar's home life, Angelica gave him a way to be a meaningful participant in a discussion that he had otherwise started to ignore. The knowledge she had of his family had come from the many visits she had made to his home. Her knowledge of his social and cultural world served as an instructional life preserver allowing Cesar to construct a response to a question to which he was struggling to respond. Literacy research has long documented that making space in the official curriculum for the lives of students opens up new avenues for students' learning (Dyson, 1993). Angelica's decisions in literacy instruction represented her commitments to creating a meaning-centered literacy learning context for her students. Garcia (1999) and Jimenez and Gersten (1999) have documented that such an approach is essential in the literacy development of Latino children.

In addition, the nature and shape of the discussion had the effect of keeping all students engaged—even Juan—who although he was not able to participate in the direct exchange was still able to share that "this is what I was going to say." Angelica set the stage for this exchange by informing the boys that were having this discussion for a particular reason—a reason directly connected to their ability to relate to the story they were about to read.

### **Additive Theories Summary**

Elisa and Angelica took steps in and out of their classroom to limit the impact of Proposition 227 on their school's bilingual program. Angelica was a central player in securing parental waivers necessary to maintain the school's bilingual program. Elisa became "mas rebelde" (more rebellious) and more purposeful in her attempts to bridge her students' Spanish and English literacy development. As a first grade teacher, Angelica was primarily responsible for Spanish literacy development. As the third grade teacher in the school's bilingual program, Elisa was primarily responsible for 'transitioning' the students from instruction primarily in Spanish to instruction primarily in English. Given the differences in their teaching situations, cross case comparisons are difficult. None the less, similar themes did emerge in the coding of teacher-run literacy from both classrooms. The coding of these events highlight the additive nature of the classroom contexts created by the two teacher. Both teachers created contexts which the following types of interactions were most prominent:

- *Events of Story Question.* Teacher questions soliciting retelling or summary of events from a story.
- *Creating/building on Intertextuality.* Comments or questions that drew upon students' social and cultural lives as resources in understanding stories the class read.
- *Concept Question.* Questions that asked students to draw conclusions or make inferences about events or concepts in stories. During English instruction, teachers encouraged students to respond in Spanish if they were not able to do so in English.
- *Turn Extension.* Comments or questions by teachers that extended student turns.

Because we did not collect any data prior to the passage of Proposition 227, it is not clear if teachers demonstrated this type of literacy prior to its passage. Thus, Proposition 227 did not cause an additive orientation for Elisa and Angelica, but rather their experiences of the Post-227 context reinforced and refined their existing additive conception of their students and bilingualism.

## **Subtractive Theories of Education for Language Minority Students**

To understand the connection between subtractive theories for language minority students and classroom practice, we present the case of Connie, a third grade teacher at Westway Elementary. Connie's case is illustrative of how teachers' existing subtractive theories materialize in classroom practice. Her case is instructive because her theory regarding the education of language minority students mirrored the theories of many school- and district- leaders who eliminated their bilingual education programs after the passage of Proposition 227 (Garcia & Curry-Rodriguez, 2000). Proposition 227 did not cause her subtractive orientation but rather reinforced it and gave her new opportunities to act upon it.

Connie's theories surrounding her students were undergirded by two major beliefs about the education of language minority students. First, she believed that the English language served as a unifying force in the United States that was undermined by multilingualism. In this sense, Connie was in striking agreement with much of the political discourse surrounding both the English-only and anti-bilingual education movements. In an interview, Connie commented, "I totally agree that

English should be **the** language of this country. You need to have some base and I think English needs to be the base here.” A child of Portuguese immigrants, Connie resented the “special treatment” that she felt Latino children and families received. She viewed bilingual education as one such “special treatment.”

Second, Connie believed that her students’ academic progress was severely limited by their use of Spanish. Thus, rather than seeing students’ primary language as a resource, she saw it as one of their primary weaknesses:

My students’ problem is that they rely too much on their Spanish. I know a lot of them came from 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classes where they spoke Spanish all the time to the teacher. It makes a big difference. My goal is that they learn as much vocabulary as they can, learn to speak grammatically correct, and have their adjectives and nouns in the right places. (Connie, Interview, December, 1999)

Connie felt that the students’ use of Spanish interfered with their acquisition of English. This subtractive theory differs sharply with the important theoretical work done in the area of second language acquisition stressing the transfer of academic and cognitive skills independent of language (Cummins, 1979).

### **From Subtractive Theory to Subtractive Practice**

Connie’s theory about language minority students resulted in a particular kind of educational practice which did not focus on the cultural, social, and linguistic resources brought by her students. Watered-down and deficit-based literacy practice in the new policy environment reflected Connie’s instructional goals and expectations for her students (Gersten & Woodward, 1992; Ramirez, 1992). A significant amount of instructional time focused on phonetic exactness—moments in instruction when Connie focused on the components and sounds of words. During these interactions Connie’s emphasis was on correct pronunciation and strict adherence to following directions. Coding of literacy events revealed that Connie’s literacy practice centered on the following types of interactions:

- *Word Meaning.* Connie asked the students about the meaning of an individual word. She used the word in a sentence until the students could supply a synonym.
- *Conventions.* Connie asked the students about the punctuation of a particular sentence, or she asked students to identify words that were particular parts of speech in the text.
- *Phonetic Exactness.* Connie worked with the students to ensure the proper pronunciation of English words and phonemes.

Her emphasis on these three types of interactions was influenced by the nature of the Open Court program and its literacy material. During teacher run reading events, Connie seldom asked questions regarding the story events or the plot. Connie often asked students to identify compound words or to circle long vowels. Such interaction contributed to the treatment of text as a puzzle. Texts were viewed as little more than the sum total of their phonetic or grammatical values. During literacy instruction, Connie closely adhered to the script of the Open Court teacher’s manual. Open Court activities dominated her instructional day. Beyond the 40

minutes that Connie spent in math instruction, the entire day was occupied with Open Court literacy activities.

The following literacy event, highlights the nature of literacy instruction in Connie's classroom and the manner that Connie's beliefs about her students, which were in large part influenced by her own familiar experience, seemed to influence the enactment of such literacy practice.

Connie stood at the front of the class and had just read the first problem of the worksheet. She instructed students that they were supposed to circle each long vowel sound in each of the sentences and write the word in the long vowel column. This was the third in a series of worksheets the class had done that day. Connie completed the first three sentences with the students. In each sentence, her pattern was fairly consistent. She read the sentence and asked the students which words in the sentence had a long vowel sound. Students were not allowed to pick up their pencils until the class had identified all the long vowel sounds. During the first three sentences, a few student called answers without being officially recognized. When this happened on the 4<sup>th</sup> sentence, Connie said, "Since you seem to have no problem with this activity you can do it on your own."

Ruben and Miguel, who were seated on the opposite side of the room from where I was, excitedly rubbed their hands together. I got up from my seat and sat behind Miguel, a child who always seemed to have a smile on his face.

Miguel: (Reading number 5) (Reads in a flat tone with no questioning intonation.) Will Pat go to the store. (Pauses for a moment) Will Pat **go to** the store. (Flat intonation). Will Pat...Pat go to the store? (An almost raised but unnatural intonation on store). [He raises his head from the text]. That doesn't make any sense. (almost smugly) Don't matter. [He picks up his pencil and writes the words "go" and "store" in the Long O column.]

This literacy event highlighted many of the themes which emerged from the study of Connie's classroom. Classroom instruction focused on the component parts of reading. Connie's comfort with this focus was related to her views about the instructional needs of her students. The event also highlighted the tightly controlled nature of literacy events. In the activity—as was the case with many others—students were allowed to do the work independently only as a form of punishment. Lastly, the event indicated the nature of students' experiences of literacy curriculum which stressed skills over meaning.

Connie believed that her students would experience success if they stopped speaking Spanish in the classroom. During grade level teacher meetings, Connie voiced this position. Her comments generally related to "deficits" in the students (Lipman, 1998). While it is highly likely that Connie's deficit perspectives of her students existed prior to Proposition 227, she noted that Proposition 227 had allowed her to act on her beliefs about the needs of her students in ways that she had not been able to. Because she was convinced that several issues outside the



realm of her classroom contributed to the academic failure of the students, she took no actions to change the programmatic and curricular actions at the school.

Connie's ideological alignment with the law and her views about her students played a large role in the connection between policy and practice in her classroom. The following literacy exchange taken from a field note entry occurred early in the year and was indicative of her priorities and perceptions:

Connie told the class that she wants them to work on their reading comprehension, and that to do so they are going to read stories on worksheets that will help them understand other stories better. Connie told the students to place their fingers under the first word and called on individual students to read a story about a snowflake. The story was a part of the first grade skills practice of Open Court. She called on Sonia, who struggles to read the first sentence of the eight sentence story.

Connie said, "OK, Sonia, since Luis is ready to read I am going to give him a chance." Luis, a recent immigrant in the class with very strong decoding skills did not understand Connie's request as a request to read because he wasn't called on directly. He stared at Sonia and then turned his gaze back to the teacher. Connie nodded at him, and he still looked confused. A student sitting next to him said in a quiet voice, "Tienes que leerlo" [You have to read it.] Connie clinches her fist, "Uhg," she said with great exasperation, "Don't say it in Spanish!" (October 21, 2000).

The event which was similar to many literacy events in Connie's classrooms speaks to two beliefs that guided her approach to classroom literacy instruction: 1) Spanish was a detriment to her students' academic progress, and 2) what her students needed most were the "basics." Connie's interaction with the local school context influenced the way these beliefs surfaced in her classroom literacy practice. She noted that the move to English-only made her feel more comfortable in stopping her students from speaking Spanish in the classroom.

## **Subtractive Summary**

For Connie, Proposition 227 offered an opportunity to enact a subtractive version of language and literacy practice in her classroom. Literacy instruction in her classroom was heavily influenced by her theories about her students and their bilingualism. Proposition 227 and its subtractive implications for the schooling of culturally and linguistically diverse students complemented Connie's existing views of her students and gave her liberty to attempt to restrict and limit students' use of Spanish in her classroom. While we do not claim that Connie's use of the Open Court literacy series is representative of all uses of the program, Connie's case illustrates how teachers with subtractive theories of their students might utilize and implement aspects of similar skills-based scripted literacy programs.

## **Conclusion**

California has begun a weighty experiment in the instruction of language minority students based upon subtractive theories of education. The underlying theory of Proposition 227 suggests that linguistic diversity is a problem in need of correction,

and instruction exclusively in English provides the best therapy for such deficiencies. Such a theory of instruction suggests that the primary role of schooling is Americanization.

Proposition 227 is not just a theory, but one of the dominating policy voices in California and the nation guiding the schooling of linguistically diverse students. Given that teachers will continue to be the last line of implementation in this growing policy trend, it is important consider various aspects of the roles they play. In this article, we have chosen to focus on the role that teachers' existing theories about their students play in the way they reacted to aspects of Proposition 227. To understand the range of teachers' theories, we have presented distinctions between additive and subtractive conceptions of language minority students.

The distinction between additive and subtractive conceptions of schooling for culturally and linguistically diverse students are a useful tool for understanding how teachers' existing theories were complemented or contrasted by Proposition 227 implementation. For Angelica and Elisa, the two teachers with strong additive conceptions of schooling, Proposition 227 served to strengthen their commitments to bilingual education. Their renewed commitments were evident in the manner in which they framed their classroom practice in relation to Proposition 227. Elisa asserted that Proposition 227 had made her more determined to use students primary language as a resource; and, Angelica, compared Proposition 227 to getting knocked down in a soccer game:

Proposition 227 really pushed the people that did believe in continuing fighting for our dream. It's like a soccer game. You didn't make the goal. Oh, well. You have a chance of getting up and trying again. Soccer players fall many times during a game. They trip over each other. We can trip over these polices and fall over these laws. You can trip me, and I'll fall, but I'm going to get up again. I'll keep going. When things like Proposition 227 happen, just don't trip, fall, and stay laying down.  
(Angelica, Interview, May, 2000)

Angelica saw Proposition 227 as one major impediment to enacting an additive conception of education, but she saw it as a challenge she could and would overcome.

The additive conceptions possessed by Elisa and Angelica served as a basis for how they reacted to and mediated aspects of Proposition 227 implementation. Angelica was a key member in securing parental waivers at the school which enabled the school to maintain its bilingual program. Both teachers saw the manner in which they constructed their classroom literacy practice as a response to the political and pedagogical implications of Proposition 227 implementation. They considered their attempts to create an additive classroom context for their students as ways to fight for bilingual education. Thus, the teachers' additive conceptions played a significant role in the actions the two teachers took in and out of their classroom contexts.

For Connie, her subtractive conceptions of her students were complemented by the political and pedagogical implications of Proposition 227. In many senses, the subtractive policy context served to clarify her pedagogical purpose. As she

interacted with the local policy context, the result was an enactment of practice which was a direct match of the intent of the new law. As her students became more resistant and distant based upon their experience of Open Court, she became more convinced that her students needed more “basic” instruction. As her experience as part of family that “made it” without any special programs influenced her views of the policy, she became more convinced that any Spanish usage in her class was detrimental to student learning. She enacted punitive rules for students who used Spanish and noted that Proposition 227 had given her the feeling that this was a proper course of action to take.

The importance of teachers’ theories and beliefs has been supported by Wiese’s (2001) examinations of a policy and practice at a dual language immersion school after the passage of Proposition 227. She found that the manner in which Federal and State educational policy is reconstructed at school level was highly influenced by teachers’ theories about their students, instruction, and the world around them.

Seeking the day when all language minority students will conclude that what they do in their classrooms does matter, we suggest that the theories that teachers hold about their students and instruction play a monumental role in the face of educational policies designed to lead to specific practices. Theories can bolster the intent of the policy, as was the case with Connie and the teachers at Westway Elementary, or theories can provide teachers with a powerful basis to resist and reshape the intended consequences of certain policies. If teachers are to capitalize on the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural resources which language minority students bring to the classroom, then those concerned with education must continue to pursue and develop substantial ways to support and develop additive conceptions of linguistic diversity in teachers.

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